



Climate and Culture

Turnaround Principle #2

The focus of this article for this month is [Turnaround Principle 2 –School Climate and Culture](#). Turnaround Principles are not only used as a strategic system to support schools that may be struggling, but more importantly the eight principles are indicators for high performing schools. When discussing [Turnaround Principle 2](#) the establishment of a positive climate and culture in your school requires the principal and school staff to respond to the social, emotional, and learning needs of all students. An effective principal ensures that systems are established and supports are in place to address these needs, focusing on building a safe environment, a strong culture of learning, and setting high expectations for both staff and students.

Having a positive school environment is important to everyone in the building. It is important to collect data that will allow the school to answer questions such as: Do students and staff feel safe in the building? Is it clean and welcoming? In a school with this environment, students and staff take pride in their building and help to maintain its positive atmosphere. If someone were to walk around the building, he/she would see what the school's initiatives are by what are on the walls, or in common areas for students. A visitor would also see that behavior is handled consistently across classrooms. If asked, students could articulate both the behavioral and academic expectations as well as the consequences.

School Environment

The building principal consistently monitors the environmental culture of the building through the use of surveys and data that is collected on a regular basis and analyzed. When the school leadership team analyzes behavior data, the most common infractions can tell a lot about whether those situations are being handled consistently or if the expectations have been communicated well enough. Once the data is reviewed, principals and building staff can then invoke the network of supports available for academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students.

Culture of Learning

To create a strong culture of learning, both students and staff need to understand that the focus is on learning. The principal must protect the academic learning time. While school convocations and field trips are important and exciting for students, the expectations must be established that the learning outcomes of these events must align to the academic standards and goals of the school. To maintain a culture of learning, it is important that it is promoted and the focus of conversations. It is essential that teachers are frequently analyzing student data. Part of this data analysis requires teachers to discuss and determine instructional strategies for differentiation as well as determining immediate interventions for students that best meet their needs. It's not enough to just know WHERE the student is, but rather how to react to his/her needs.

It is also essential that the principal must monitor all of these pieces. Just as in principle #1 – Effective Leadership – the principal has to be in the classrooms daily completing walk-throughs, monitoring the implementation and identifying supports that teachers may need to improve instruction and classroom practice. These quick observations help drive decisions about multiple facets of the school.

High Expectations

High expectations are a must when establishing a positive climate and culture. As educators, we assume students know what we expect, which is not accurate. Students need to be taught expectations. Expectations should be clearly defined for both behavior and academics. In order to make sure students and staff know and understand the expectations, they must be communicated in many ways and frequently. Those high expectations should carry over to staff and student work. High expectations for staff must consist of high quality instruction, including student engagement, and higher levels of discussion, classwork, and homework. The principal also clearly defines professional expectations for staff for communication, conduct, confidentiality, cultural competency, and other elements of professionalism.